

The Braemar Way



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Dear Colleague

Braemar cardiothoracic surgeon David McCormack has worked in London's leading hospitals

BUT IT IS IN NEW ZEALAND – THE PLACE HE CALLS “PARADISE” – WHERE HE BELIEVES HE CAN DO HIS BEST WORK...



Modern life is flush with hints on how to live well, exhorting us to be mindful, compassionate and aware of our legacy. Nothing reminds cardiothoracic surgeon David McCormack about why these things matter as time spent in caring for patients. “We get people coming to us who are unreasonably ill. We have the ability to step in, stand in the way of death, and say, ‘not today’ and send them back to their life. We do that standing on the shoulders of others who have gone before us and who work alongside us. I ask myself constantly, ‘what can I do that benefits the patient more; what will give them a safer operation, better quality of life and provide the care they deserve?’”

The philosophy was also behind his decision to practise medicine. “In a lot of things we do when one person profits, the other loses. In medicine, a key attraction is that we all go there with the same agenda: The patient wants to get better, the family wants them to get

better, the cardiologist wants them to get better. I want them to get better. The shared common goal is important to me. In medicine I have found that.”

In the public sector, David is a consultant cardiothoracic surgeon at Waikato DHB, with a special interest in aortic practice. He came to New Zealand from the UK because, “Why wouldn’t you? It’s the best country in the world”, and at the behest of Waikato DHB clinical director of cardiothoracic surgery, Adam el Gamel, with whom he had previously worked in London. His CV reads like a roll call of some of the most prestigious hospitals in the UK, including eight London teaching hospitals. His awards include a multitude of academic prizes, scholarships and research grants and more than 30 articles in international peer-reviewed journals. As well, he lectures at Auckland university, and shares knowledge through social media with practitioners in other countries who don’t have access to safe surgery.

But he has little time for self-aggrandisement. His focus is on increasing the knowledge and expertise of others in New Zealand and overseas, and in collaborating to deliver the best outcomes for patients. “We need to deliver care that is patient-centred and health-focused. A key value is teamwork. For example, the work of the cardiologist is crucial and our interaction with cardiologists needs to be transparent and honest so the patient understands what is going on. Likewise, with the team in theatre and post-operative care. There is so much more to heart surgery than a scalpel and a suture. We need to have a shared common mental model where everyone knows what is going to happen and can exact the plan.”

That shared mental model is also part of a programme called CALS (Cardiac Surgery Advanced Life Support) – of which David is the New Zealand course director. Through the programme critical care staff are trained to respond quickly

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and efficiently to a patient in cardiac arrest following heart surgery. "If a patient's heart stops, you've got five minutes to get it sorted," he says. "It's all about teamwork."

With CALS everyone has an assigned role, and everyone knows how to do that role. We work together to bring safety to the patient." The Waikato training programme is regarded by many as the best in the world.

Another programme he helped develop at St Bartholomew's Hospital in London, has also had an impact worldwide. The ROQAS Project (Recovery from Operation Quality Assurance System) links multidisciplinary care, clinical wisdom, institutional learning and artificial intelligence to optimise the patient's care. "For example, when a patient comes into the hospital, we now provide bespoke and individualised care tailored to their specific needs." This exciting piece of work has received awards and commendation from institutions such as the Society for Cardiothoracic Surgery, the Patient Safety Awards and the British Medical Association.

Eight years ago, when he was a registrar, David co-wrote a paper for the British Medical Journal about cardiothoracic surgery as a career. He wrote it was a field that was both challenging and rewarding, adding "There are many reasons to be optimistic about the future..." He has not changed his view. "Year on year, patients present with more pre-existing medical conditions and the surgery is more taxing.

Yet the outcomes continue to improve. New developments offer new possibilities. For example, when we operate on the

mitral valve, replacing the valve with mechanical or animal tissues used to be the default. Now we routinely preserve the patient's own tissues. This is better for the patient and a more durable solution. Rather than replacing things, we have the finesse to tailor them to optimally work again."

He says Braemar Hospital's approach to care of patients, and its attention to detail, technological edge and team approach, all mesh with his own needs and values. "It's a positive, forward-thinking approach, with patients always at the centre."

In his spare time, his passion is karate. He is a 4th degree Black Belt and has represented England. He aspires to go higher and continues to train in New Zealand, while mentoring others remotely in the UK. He says there are many parallels in heart surgery and the martial arts. "Both require a great dexterity and symbiosis of the body. You need to understand the challenge and plan to overcome that challenge. Sometimes Plans B, C or D are required. Martial arts helps one focus. It also develops discipline and resilience." More than that, he says, "karate do" is a pathway or a way of life that goes well beyond self-defence. "It's about accepting the challenges life throws at you and using them for the benefit of people around you. It teaches you how to accept what comes your way and utilise it for the common good." It's a philosophy that sits well with his approach to medicine.



Dr Greg Spark – Deputy Chairman

DAVID MCCORMACK

QUALIFICATIONS

- Bachelor of Science (Honours) – King's College – University of London
- Bachelor of Medicine & Bachelor of Surgery (Distinction) – University of London
- Fellow of Royal College of Surgeons of England – Cardiothoracic Surgery
- Fellow of Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh – Cardiothoracic Surgery

RECENT PRIZES AND AWARDS

- Waikato DHB – Sustaining Excellence in Patient Safety Award
- Patient Safety Awards - Technology & IT to Improve Patient Safety – Finalist
- British Medical Journal Awards – Transforming Patient Care Using Technology – Finalist
- Society for Cardiothoracic Surgery in Great Britain and Ireland – Ethicon International Fellowship
- T-Log / Association of Surgeons in Training – Surgical Education and Training Award
- Society for Cardiothoracic Surgery in Great Britain and Ireland / ASIT Cardiothoracic Research Award

ROOMS AT

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AREAS OF SPECIALISATION

Mr McCormack is vocationally registered in cardiothoracic surgery. He provides expert and focussed treatment for heart disease. His areas of interest include:

Ischaemic heart disease – Revascularisation – Coronary surgery, Aortic valve surgery, Mitral and tricuspid repair and replacement, Aortovascular surgery, Aortic root surgery, Aneurysm management, Heart failure surgery, Multivalve surgery.

SPECIALIST TRAINING

Mr McCormack completed formal training in cardiothoracic surgery in world leading centres. Below is a collection of central London centres within which Mr McCormack was trained:

Barts Heart Centre, Guy's Hospital, St Thomas' Hospital, King's College London, Harefield Hospital, Imperial College Healthcare – Hammersmith Hospital, St Georges' Hospital.

POSITIONS & MEMBERSHIPS

- Consultant Cardiothoracic Surgeon – Waikato DHB
- Consultant Cardiothoracic Surgeon – Braemar Hospital
- Senior Lecturer in Surgery – Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences – University of Auckland
- Vocational Registration – Cardiothoracic Surgery – New Zealand Medical Council
- Certificate of Completion of Training – Cardiothoracic Surgery – General Medical Council (UK)
- Faculty of Surgical Trainers – Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh
- Fellow of Royal Society of Medicine
- Australian & New Zealand Society of Cardiac & Thoracic Surgeons
- Cardiac Society of Australia and New Zealand
- European Association for Cardiothoracic Surgery
- Society for Cardiothoracic Surgery in Great Britain & Ireland

